

Corporation for National and Community Service

NationalService.gov



Title: VISTA Request For Concept Papers Notice

Date posted: February 28, 2020

Date issued: 2019

Unique identifier: VISTA 003

Topic: Request for Concept Papers

Summary: This letter requests concept papers from organizations interested in hosting an AmeriCorps VISTA.

The contents of this document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

REQUEST FOR CONCEPT PAPERS: FY 2020 AmeriCorps VISTA State New Projects

INTRODUCTION

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) seeks Concept Papers for the AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) program from outcome-driven organizations that share the **AmeriCorps VISTA mission of providing long term solutions to poverty**. Please share this notice with your networks and contact your CNCS Field Office with any questions.

OVERVIEW OF CNCS: CNCS (www.nationalservice.gov) is a federal agency that helps Americans improve their lives, through dedicated service opportunities in our signature programs: Senior Corps and AmeriCorps. More than 60,000 organizations are impacted by national service volunteers. As the nation's largest grant-maker for service and volunteering, CNCS plays a critical role in strengthening America's nonprofit sector and addressing our nation's challenges through service. The mission of CNCS is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

OVERVIEW OF AMERICORPS VISTA: Founded in 1965, AmeriCorps VISTA is a federal anti-poverty program designed to provide needed resources to nonprofit organizations, federal, state and local governments, tribal governments and public agencies to increase their capacity to lift communities out of poverty. AmeriCorps VISTA is a full-time national service program for organizations interested in developing lasting solutions to the problem of poverty in the United States. Projects must be developed in accordance with four core principles: an anti-poverty focus; community empowerment; sustainable solutions; and capacity building.

- **Anti-Poverty Focus**

The purpose of AmeriCorps VISTA is to strengthen and support efforts to eliminate and alleviate poverty and address poverty-related problems in the United States. Each VISTA project must focus on empowering individuals to emerge from poverty, not

simply making poverty more tolerable. **VISTA projects should focus on long-term solutions to poverty rather than short-term services.**

- ***Community Empowerment***

Prospective and current AmeriCorps VISTA project sponsors must engage people of the communities to be served by the project in planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating the project. Each project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of community residents, and tap into inherent community assets, strengths, and resources.

- ***Sustainable Solutions***

The AmeriCorps VISTA members represent short-term resources for up to three years to help sponsoring organizations address poverty related issues and build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs in their communities. Projects should be developed with a goal to phase out the need for VISTA members and have a sustainable project continue without them. After a period of time, the sponsor must demonstrate that they can sustain those services on their own as members phase out of the project and, if applicable, grant funds are reduced.

- ***Capacity Building***

VISTA members do not provide direct service to individuals, but instead work to develop or improve the effectiveness or efficiency of programs designed to fight poverty. Through activities such as community assessments, identifying cash and in-kind resources, recruiting and coordinating community outreach and partnerships and other capacity-building activities, VISTA members mobilize resources to achieve lasting solutions and build capacity for sponsoring organizations to sustain those solutions. VISTA projects expand the scale, impact, and resource leveraging ability of specific antipoverty programs of their sponsor and the communities they serve. All activities should be focused on creating pathways out of poverty for low-income communities and the capacity building work must be focused on anti-poverty programs and not the organization as a whole.

PRIORITIES/PRIORITY POPULATIONS:

- *Economic Opportunity:* Housing, Employment/Workforce Development (particularly career and technical education (CTE) programs), and Bridging the Digital Divide
- *Education:* School Readiness, K-12 Success, Career and Technical Education (CTE), College Access and Success, and STEM
- *Healthy Futures:* Access to Health Care, Food Security, and Opioid Addiction Prevention and Recovery
- *Veterans and Military Families:* Economic Opportunity, Education, and Healthy Futures
- *Priority Populations:* Rural communities, Indian country, and areas of concentrated poverty

VISTA MEMBER BENEFITS AND LOGISTICS: AmeriCorps VISTA members are placed at sponsoring organizations and serve approximately 40 hours per week addressing issues which have been locally identified as community priorities. The project goals and activities are designed to build the sponsor's capacity to serve low-income communities. CNCS provides a modest living allowance depending on the county in which the VISTA serves, health benefits, and childcare benefits (if eligible). Members also receive either the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award or an end-of-service cash stipend upon successful completion of their full year of service.

SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS ELIGIBILITY: Nonprofit organizations, Native American Tribes, and state, city, and local government agencies are eligible to apply to be AmeriCorps VISTA sponsors. Eligible not-for-profit organizations are NOT limited to those with IRS 501(c)(3) status but those with any IRS 501(c) status that focus on anti-poverty community development. Organizations that focus solely on advocacy and lobbying are **not eligible**. Sponsoring organizations may be local, statewide, or national and must be able to manage the project, recruit, supervise, and provide logistical support (e.g. supplies and materials, on-the-job training, mileage reimbursement or other transportation support) to the VISTA members. A VISTA project may be continued on a year to year basis for up to three years based upon available resources, performance, and CNCS priorities.

COST SHARE PARTNERSHIP: An arrangement whereby the sponsoring organization pays the living allowance for one or more of its VISTAs, Leaders, or Summer Associates. VISTA members placed under a cost share agreement are subject to the same terms, conditions, and benefits as non-cost share members. The partnership is an affordable way for a sponsor to increase its number of AmeriCorps VISTA members. Benefits to cost share partnerships include the following: 1) helping to expand VISTA resources across the country, 2) demonstrating that sponsors are invested in the success of their VISTA project, 3) a method that organizations can employ to sustain a high quality VISTA project, and 4) providing a means to expand a relationship as the organization expands funding and increases capacity.

Guidance & Instructions:

- [AmeriCorps VISTA Program Guidance](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Concept Paper Instructions](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Project Application Instructions](#)
- [AmeriCorps VISTA Standard Budget Instructions](#)

Additional Resources:

- [General Information](#)
- [Sponsoring a VISTA Project](#)
- [Create and Manage an eGrants Account](#)
- [View Recorded Webinar](#)

AmeriCorps VISTA FY2020 Request for Concept Papers Timeline

Task	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3: <i>Please note that these dates have been modified to accommodate the merging of Q3 and Q4.</i>
VISTA Request for Concept Papers Webinar	Thursday, September 5, 2019 at 2pm ET Click here to view previously recorded webinar	Thursday, December 5, 2019 at 2pm ET Click here to view previously recorded webinar	TBD Click here to view previously recorded webinars
Concept Papers due	Tuesday, October 1, 2019 at 11:59pm ET	Wednesday, January 1, 2020 at 11:59pm ET	Monday, June 1, 2020 at 11:59pm ET
Concept Paper decisions	Wednesday, November 6, 2019	Wednesday, February 12, 2020	Wednesday, July 29, 2020
Application decision target date	Wednesday, December 11, 2019	Wednesday, March 18, 2020	Wednesday, September 9, 2020

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Applicants are recommended to contact their local CNCS Field Office to discuss project ideas and questions prior to submitting a concept paper. Please note that local CNCS Field Offices may conduct additional webinars not listed above. [CNCS Field Office contact information](#) is available on our website. To email your Field Office, include your two-letter state abbreviation followed by @cns.gov (i.e. MD@cns.gov).